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Lebanese President Renews Pledge for Justice on Anniversary of Beirut Port Blast

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Lebanon marked five years since the Beirut port explosion with a national day of mourning as President Joseph Aoun renewed his commitment to justice for the victims. The blast, one of the most powerful non-nuclear explosions in history, claimed over 220 lives, injured thousands, and left widespread devastation across the capital.

The explosion on 4 August 2020 was caused by a fire igniting approximately 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored improperly in a port warehouse. The hazardous material had been kept there for years despite documented warnings to high-ranking officials. In a public statement on Monday, President Aoun declared that “justice is coming” and emphasised that “the law applies to all, without exception,” regardless of rank or position.

Thousands of Lebanese citizens are expected to attend rallies and memorial events throughout the day, including gatherings at the port itself. Addressing the victims' families directly, Aoun stated, "The blood of your loved ones will not be in vain. Justice is coming, accountability is coming."

After years of political and legal delays, the investigation has recently progressed. According to a judicial official, Judge Tarek Bitar has completed questioning suspects and is awaiting responses from several Arab and European countries regarding specific incidents linked to the case. Once procedural steps are finalised, the case will be referred to the public prosecution before any indictments are issued.

Judge Bitar's investigation had previously stalled amid political interference. The Hezbollah group, which has played a significant role in Lebanese politics, accused him of bias and demanded his removal. The inquiry resumed following changes in Lebanon's leadership, with both President Aoun and Prime Minister Nawaf Salam expressing support for an independent judiciary. Prime Minister Salam, a former judge at the International Court of Justice, reiterated on Sunday that achieving truth and accountability is a national duty.

Relatives of those killed have long accused officials of obstructing justice. Mariana Fodoulian, representing a victims' advocacy group, stated: "For five years, officials have been trying to evade accountability, always thinking they are above the law." She added, "We're not asking for anything more than the truth. We won't stop until we get comprehensive justice."

In a symbolic move, Culture Minister Ghassan Salame announced that the partially destroyed wheat silos at the blast site will be listed as historic structures. Families of the victims have requested the silos be preserved as a permanent memorial to those who lost their lives.

The fifth anniversary serves as a stark reminder of the tragedy and the continued demand for accountability. While progress remains cautious, the renewed public and governmental focus on transparency has brought the prospect of justice closer to those affected.